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ABSTRACT

This paper explores political engagement in an increasingly difficult and troubled world by focusing on how U.S. college students participate in the largest simulation of the United Nations (UN) organization in the United States. The purpose of the paper is to explore what is done in the National Model UN (NMUN) program, its impact on the lives and careers of the participants, and its long-term effects on their involvement in civil society. It also shares the results of an informed survey recently conducted with 15 former model UN participants. Includes 16 notes. Contains 17 references and the survey. (BT)

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Model UN and Political Engagement

by Richard Reitano

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American politics has many strange aspects, but few so mysterious as the decline in electoral participation…The decline is attributable to the march of time. The civic-minded generation raised during the Depression and the Second World War has been gradually replaced by the more private-minded X and Y generations that lived through childhood and adolescence without having experienced a great national crisis.

-Thomas Patterson[i]

There has been a surge of patriotic sentiment among young people...They think you can be a citizen by watching and applauding other people doing public work.

-William Galston[ii]

Every man would then share in the government of affairs not merely on election day but every day.

-John Dewey paraphrasing Thomas Jefferson[iii]

By my experience in local high schools…I knew that most students were taught politics by rote and without enthusiasm. In that way politics were the same as algebra. Either you prospered by native interest or you memorized what you needed to know and got by. Naturally this approach did not teach civic responsibility or foster political engagement; if anything, it bred generalized apathy.

-Jason Elfenbein[iv]

This paper will explore political engagement in an increasingly difficult and troubled world by focusing on how American college students participate in the largest simulation of the United Nations organization in the United States. My purpose in writing the paper is to explore what we do in the National Model UN (NMUN) program, its impact on the lives and careers of the participants, and its long-term effects on their involvement in civil society. I will also share the results of an informed survey I recently conducted with former model UN participants.

For many young people today, civic responsibility and involvement are alien concepts. In fact, as William Galston observes, "[m]ost Americans believe that during the past 40 years, important aspects of their society have changed for the worse." He points out that Americans are concerned because they view disengagement as "linked to the decline of trust… (and to) the loss of…control over one's own fate and that of one's community." Galston also believes that the "thinning" of one's knowledge of what is happening in society has given rise to a powerful (and distrusted) media and contributes to the "erosion of stability and security in our daily lives." (Galston)

As a participant in the Political Engagement Project (PEP) for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, I agree with one of the fundamental conclusions of the organizers of the project. In their book, *Educating Citizens*, they note that their "field work has made it clear that moral and civic education can be implemented successfully in all kinds of institutions and can be shaped to fit a wide variety of educational missions." (Colby *et al* 2003, xiii)

Model UN does not involve service learning in any traditional way, but it does foster a sense of community, i.e., students must work together, listen to each other, and cooperate with and accommodate people whose views they often disagree with, and the experience does have a lasting impact on the participants, i.e., their values, their concern for others, and their involvement in community-related and even national activities. In addition, the competition and the goal orientation in the simulation play an important role. The competitive challenge of the simulation engages student participants emotionally and intellectually in ways that are far different and more extensive than more routine intellectual competition.

Ken Topolsky, a successful television and film producer and director, noted in his responses to the survey that Model UN had not affected his "choice of careers," but it "has affected (his) commitment to people." He has worked with non-governmental organizations, former President Jimmy Carter and the Carter Center, and Sam Nujuommo (President of Namibia) on the "needs of the Southern World and the role we in the North can play." Topolsky produced *Los Anos Magicos*, a fundraising video, on his own time and with his own money to further Latin American development projects. In his community, he has served as zoning board chair, chairman of the board of trustees of a local independent school, and he founded a neighborhood association. Because of his influence in Hollywood and the economic resources he can access, Topolsky remains committed to combating the "ignorance we Americans…wallow in today." According to him, the "NMUN experience has reinforced the lesson that we are our brother's keeper."[v]

Topolsky's civic involvement in middle age (he is now 52 years old) reflects the involvement he had as a young man at Dutchess Community College where he served as president of the student government association, where he engaged in a wide variety of socially responsible activities, and where he was an active participant in the Model UN program. The research tends to confirm that, "civic training in adolescence can influence adult behavior." Young people who are actively involved are "more likely than their non-volunteering counterparts to engage in volunteering, community activities, and other forms of civic life as adults." (Andolina *et al* 2003, 275)

It is not the purpose of this paper to argue either the case for civic involvement or to critique the "Bowling Alone" thesis (and its impact). It should be noted that there are many scholars who dispute any decline in civic involvement and even suggest, "[a]mericans are increasingly coming together within support groups, hobby clubs, and short-term volunteer projects."[vi] In fact, Harry Boyte reminds us that the CIA had warned in a report, *Global Trends 2015,* prior to September 11 that terrorism was connected globally to "poverty, illicit weapons, AIDS, famine, sectarian warfare, three

billion people short of water, and slave labor." The "bright spots were powerful, savvy citizen initiatives addressing them." Boyte cited the end of apartheid in South Africa, the defeat of communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the elimination of dictatorships in Chile and the Philippines, and the grassroots efforts to create an International Criminal Court as evidence of more (and not less) political engagement worldwide. (Boyte)

In fairness, young people also face more obstacles to civic involvement than ever before. Unlike my generation, there is no war, which directly affects most of them, and there is no draft, which motivated many people of my generation to oppose the war in Viet Nam. The civil rights movement has largely been forgotten, and the struggle for gender equality is in a relatively dormant phase. The Supreme Court may render decisions on affirmative action or gay rights, but these decisions have been largely removed from the political process and from popular discussion and involvement.

Theda Skoepol believes that the proliferation of advocacy groups in recent years has had an extremely negative impact on American civic life. This may be in response to the number of hours that high school and college students work in jobs outside of school. In many families today, both parents are also working, and there is less time for the kinds of volunteer work that my parents engaged in when I was a kid. In short, advocacy groups may have proliferated in recent years to fill a void at the grass roots level. Skoepol maintains that the result is "a new civic America largely run by advocates and managers without members, and marked by yawning gaps between immediate involvements and larger undertakings." She argues that the 1944 GI Bill of Rights, if introduced today, would be defeated just as the 1994 Clinton health reforms were defeated by interest groups and by the enormous infusions of money into the political process.[vii] (Miller)

During my 36 years teaching students involved in Model UN programs, I have witnessed the impact of these rising impediments to student engagement, and I have seen how the NMUN experience succeeds in creating the opportunity for engagement with activities that provide for a healthy long-term civic life. The keys to its effectiveness are an emphasis on "hands-on" learning by emphasizing the importance of achieving genuine expertise, by the expenditure of hard work and the necessity of cooperation with others to meet a real challenge, by developing a sensitivity to the differences between us and other very different cultures, and by recognizing the importance of being able to see the world as other see it.

As Robin Laurita observed in her responses to the survey, she is a "better citizen all around." Because of Model UN, Laurita is a "more informed voter," she has become a member of Oxfam International and Amnesty International, and she has become an active member of the Rural Migrants Ministry, a local organization, which "fights for the rights of migrant workers."[viii]

What is the National Model United Nations, then, and how does it work? The National Model United Nations (NMUN) originated in 1923 as a simulation of the League of Nations. The NMUN adopted its present form in 1946 after the creation of the

United Nations the previous year. NMUN is sponsored by the National Collegiate Conference Association (NCCA), a non-profit organization, with an elected board of directors. Approximately 3000 college students from throughout the United States, Canada, and about 40 international student delegations represent the membership of the UN and many of its affiliated non-governmental organizations at the annual five-day simulation in New York City. Topics on the Model UN committees vary from the process of modernization and democratization in developing nations to attempts to achieve social justice for women and children to ethnic and religious-based violence and conflict in the world today. Delegates are expected to represent the positions of their assigned country, accurately and faithfully, by caucusing with other delegates, writing position papers and resolutions, and working with other delegates to achieve consensus, if possible, on issues, which are often contentious in nature.

The Model UN has three staff persons who are paid small stipends and a volunteer staff of about 70 additional people. They are truly volunteers, a few of whom also receive a nominal stipend. Some of the staff direct committees, or supervise other staff at various organizational levels, and all assist the Secretary-General, Director-General, and Executive Director in the performance of their duties. The staff volunteers many hours in writing background guides for the various NMUN committees and in participating in the five-day simulation in New York City, while holding down jobs and, in many cases, still attending undergraduate or graduate schools. Several are practicing lawyers who volunteer their time to the organization. The 2004 staff is (or has been) affiliated with approximately 45 colleges and universities from throughout the United States and abroad. All are highly competent, hard working, and very dedicated and devoted to the NMUN and its mission.

As stated in a *NCCA Annual Report*, "A diverse group of informed (student) participants are given a forum in which to discuss global concerns that closely parallels the 'real' (UN organization)." (*NCCA 2001-2002 Annual Report)* The demographics of the student delegate population do reflect an international, cultural, and gender diversity. In the 2003 conference, 37% of the participants were Caucasian, 5.7% were African-Americans, another 2.7% were multiracial, 2.9% were Asian American, 5.2% were Hispanic-American, 39.7% were international students, and the rest did not specify either a cultural or ethnic identification. Some 54% of the 2,956 delegates were women, and 92% of all the participants were "traditional age," 18-25 years old. The international delegations were from Europe (62%), from Canada and Latin America (29%), and from Asia and Africa (9%). (*NCCA 2003-2004 Annual Plan and Budget*) In addition, the NCCA has made a concerted effort to diversify its "American" population with a diversity program. The Diversity Building Scholarship Initiative (DBSI) supports historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) with a three-year scholarship program, and the NCCA also provides other economically disadvantaged students with financial assistance.

The diversity initiative has had an enormous impact on the student population and their sense of political awareness and engagement. Professor Karen Young, a NCCA board member and the chair of the program, conducts extensive pre- and post-conference interviews with all DBSI recipients, all of whom are from HBCU schools. Peter Paulk, a

student from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, noted in his 2003 exit interview, "Model UN…broadens your knowledge base and forces one to become more open minded. Before I became involved, I was ignorant to the issues of the world and how…globalism has interconnected the world." Antoine Harris, another student from the North Carolina college, stated that the NMUN experience gave her the "chance to communicate ideas…with people from Germany, Asia, Central and South America, and Africa." Kevin Sean Martin, a 2003 DBSI scholar from Florida A & M University, believes that his NMUN experience has refocused his goals, and he plans to pursue a career with the United Nations as a political economist. Ashley Scott, a Florida A & M student, believes that NMUN will motivate her to help bring "speakers and panels" of people to discuss global issues at the university. In short, the DBSI program has been a major catalyst in diversifying the ethnic makeup of the simulation and in increasing the political awareness and involvement of the DBSI students and perhaps their colleges and universities.

As the recent report, "Short Term Impact, Long Term Opportunities," from The Center for Information and Research in Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) suggests, there are no guarantees that young adults of color, even with the kind of experiences that Model UN offers, will act to make a difference in their communities. In fact, since 2000 survey data indicates that political engagement among African-Americans has declined nationwide. This is hardly surprising given the ambivalence which young adults of all races have regarding their ability to solve community problems. The point that should be emphasized, however, is that absent a Model UN or similar experience, there are few, if any, opportunities for young people of color to become involved in the training necessary and the confidence building required for them to become engaged on their campuses or in their larger communities. (CIRCLE)

My Model UN delegation, the Hudson River Group, is composed of students from Dutchess Community College (DCC) (where I am professor of government) and Vassar College (where I have been an adjunct professor and visiting professor) for many years. Dutchess Community College is a unit of the State University of New York (SUNY), which has both two-year colleges and four-year colleges and universities. DCC is a "comprehensive community college," with an open admissions policy, which offers transfer programs in fields such as Liberal Arts, Business, and Engineering, and a number of so-called "career" programs, which provide training for immediate job placement, such as Nursing. Vassar College is a high competitive school known for its high quality Liberal Arts program. Both are located in the Town of Poughkeepsie, New York. Some Dutchess students do transfer to Vassar, but they mostly transfer to four-year SUNY colleges and to many private schools, including Smith College, Columbia University, Williams College, and Georgetown and American Universities.

I had been teaching courses at Vassar College since the late 1980s, and I was approached by members of the Vassar Political Science Department to teach a Model UN course in 1995. I agreed to do so, and both schools, in turn, agreed to send a joint student delegation to the National Model United Nations. I invented the name Hudson River Group to negate any school distinctions and comparisons. The Model UN courses[ix] (the courses are offered simultaneously on the Vassar campus because DCC students have

cars and many Vassar students do not) are credit courses on both campuses, and I assign grades for each student at both schools even though they are all members of one delegation. In recent years, the Hudson River Group has represented the United Kingdom, Germany, Cuba, South Africa, Japan, India, the United States, and China. My biggest problem has been in merging two distinct student cultures (class and "outlook" differences) and training the students as a unified delegation where cooperation among the delegates is essential. Certainly, not all Vassar students represent upper classes in American society; most are at Vassar on scholarship. "Outlook," however, refers to a view of the world, which many Vassar students eventually adopt. They are more focused, more concerned about grades, and more aware of the academic hierarchy that separates elite four-year schools from community colleges.

An additional factor involves the amount of outside work that students do on each campus. If students work at Vassar, it is usually a non-stressful "campus job" with 10 hours of week assigned. These jobs are deliberatively non-taxing in nature. At DCC, students work, on average, about 20-30 hours a week in an off-campus job. Both workloads do affect the kind of courses that students take and the degree of or lack of involvement in community and campus activities. Like their counterparts in the adult world, many community college students believe that "the costs of acting (in their communities) will outweigh the benefits they expect to receive from the political process. Indeed, the assumption is that most citizens will find that the political world has little to offer and that their time and effort is better spent outside the political sphere." (Dudley and Gitelson 2003, 264) It is difficult, therefore, for faculty and others to convince community college students that that they have a contribution to make and an obligation to participate in campus and community activities, and that they will benefit from these involvements.

Although some students (and some faculty on both campuses) perceive of the Model UN course as "boys" or "girls" camp, the students who take the course know better. The course, which prepares students for the spring simulation, begins in late January and has been referred to by students as "delegate boot camp." At Vassar, the Model UN is a "notoriously difficult course." Even though students at both schools know this in advance (and still register for the course), some "stop and shop," re-learn the requirements (which they were aware of) during the first class session, and then drop the course. I generally bring a combined student delegation of 25-30 students from the two colleges to the NMUN.[x] Students do extensive research on the country assigned, research their committee topics and our assigned nation's position on these topics, and learn caucusing and advocacy skills. The latter includes standing firm when our nation's vital interests are concerned, but also learning how to compromise with and how to accommodate the positions of other nations, which have very different policies on difficult and complex issues.

The unique goal orientation of Model UN gives me license to be much more demanding without being arbitrary or unfair. I enlist the support of my students from the very beginning, and they give me their hard work because the failure to do so impacts negatively on every other student in the program. Unlike most courses, students get to

know each other very well, and stronger students help weaker students so that there is often a radical transformation on the part of academically weaker students in the program. They become active and effective in ways they have not experienced academically in other courses.

Students in the course learn a sense of community because they must work together, sometimes as partners, and always as one delegation. The idea of community is one of the great lessons of the program (which they take with them) and one of the skills, which they need to develop if the delegation is to be successful. As Beth Dougherty has observed about simulations, "students must learn to effectively coordinate, cooperate and communicate in a group setting…each student…must rely on others to get additional information and alternative perspectives…Simulations…give students opportunities to…develop a spirit of camaraderie which can otherwise be absent, especially in larger classes." (Dougherty 2003, 240). And, as Anthony DeRosa wrote in his survey responses, "you become a part of the political process and see how it works first hand. It whets your appetite for politics and provides you with the tools you need to become a more informed and engaged individual on the whole…From time to time, I will find myself in a meeting working with my federal counterparts to come to a common ground on an up and coming rule and it's frighteningly reminiscent of my NMUN days. I really can't express how similar it is to the 'real' political world and would suggest the class as an essential educational tool for any student pursuing a career in politics."[xi]

Beth Dougherty also points out that simulations as pedagogical techniques help build "practical skills…(and) enhance critical thinking skills...(Students) gain first-hand experiences…which deepen their understanding…but broaden their perspectives to include views with which they are unfamiliar. By putting students in control of their own learning, interactive exercises can make the real world both relevant and intellectually exciting." (Dougherty 2003, 243) So, an experience with simulations provides the tools, which can affect the "political and civic attitudes of young people." The CIRCLE Report, cited above, concluded from its research data that a young adult's "environment," including what they learn in school, impacted how they behaved in their communities and the kind of citizen they become.

Christopher Martin is a former Model UN and DCC student who transferred to Vassar College where he majored in Political Science. He is now the president of CleanScapes, a Seattle based company. CleanScapes contracts with downtown merchants to keep the streets clean so that tourists and residents feel safe and are attracted to the area. Martin employs homeless people and ex-convicts at a living wage and pays their health insurance. His company has been so successful that he recently contracted with the City of San Francisco to bring his program there. In his survey response, he wrote the following about his level of political engagement today, "I think that I am very engaged. My company does public sector functions, I often write to the paper (letter in today), I vote, and often go to various (public) meetings. I think that Model UN reinforced that all of this is important and fun."[xii] And, as Constance Flanagan, a developmental psychologist, concludes, "younger generations reinforce the principles of

the social contract—the ties that bind citizens to their polity…In so doing, they create both stability and change in the system." (Flanagan 2003, 260).

I know from first-hand experience and by discussions with faculty colleagues at NMUN that students are influenced by the Model UN experience, and it does have a positive impact on their behaviors, including their sense of right and wrong, as adult citizens. In their book, *Educating Citizens*, my Carnegie colleagues warned about the dangers of "student moral relativism." Although they dismiss the notion that it necessarily leads to "immoral behavior," they do believe that relativism should be a cause for concern, and they quote Carol Trossett who noted that the notion "everyone is entitled to his own opinion and there is no way to evaluate the validity of these opinions" often prevented students from either adequately discussing and evaluating issues which have ethical components or from influencing their opinions even when presented with incontrovertible evidence. (Colby *et al* 2003, 110-111)

Model UN does influence students and does present ethical issues they are required to make judgments about in the course of their preparation and in their participation at the conference. My students recently represented Cuba and China, for example, both nations with dismal human rights records. It was inevitable that although my delegates had to defend "their" country's policies in various NMUN committees, which dealt with human rights, they knew that the human rights records of these countries reflected indifference and insensitivity, and often, criminal behavior by the Chinese and Cuban governments regarding their own citizens. If anything, their view of the universality of human rights was reaffirmed, and my students also rejected the popular notion of cultural relativism, a lesson they took with them from the conference. Laura Vallance noted in her survey responses that as a result of her Model UN experience, she often searches "for the minority perspective on a certain issue to see what, if anything, the majority is overlooking."[xiii] Michael Brenner, another Model UN student, believes in the "ethic of using the resources at our disposal in the most moral way possible."[xiv]

Although the size of the sample from my survey is too small to draw any fundamental conclusions, I remain in contact with many students from Model UN, particularly since I have taught the course since the mid-1960s. I am also a board member of the NCCA, and I have been involved in the faculty program for many years, which gives me the opportunity to interact with colleagues from other colleges and universities and to learn about their experiences with students as well. So my observations are based on rather substantial, but admittedly, anecdotal evidence in addition to the survey results.

I e-mailed 15 former Model UN students, and I received 15 responses. The respondents varied in age from the early to mid-20s and early to mid-30s to the mid-40s and mid-50s. The program generally attracts students from all age groups; the oldest student who ever completed the program was 65 years old. Four of the students were exclusively from DCC, five transferred from DCC to Vassar, while the remaining six

were Vassar students from the beginning of their college careers. Most stated that Model UN had influenced their choice of careers (14 out of 15). The 15 students include:

- Two who are still students at Vassar College.
- Two who work in education (college teaching and administration).
- One who works as a producer/director in Hollywood.
- Three who work in government (1 state and 2 federal).
- One who works in a for-profit, but socially responsible company, which he founded.
- Two who are currently in law school.
- Four who work for non-profits.

Hector Rodriguez, for example, transferred to Syracuse University from DCC, became president of the student government, and a White House intern after graduation. He believes that the "skills" he learned through Model UN, "public speaking, advocacy, political awareness, cooperating with others," helped him develop not only a global awareness, but also a sense of what has to be done in his own community. Rodriquez has worked for former U.S. Senator Torricelli, has managed a congressional campaign in New York State, has been the Community Outreach Planner for Scenic Hudson (a major regional environmental organization), and is currently the mid-Hudson representative for Alan Hevessi, the New York State Comptroller. Claudia Archimede, a non-traditional student who transferred from DCC to Vassar, now works on "women's issues" and in a federally and state funded program for "inner city youth" who are rebuilding a house in the City of Poughkeepsie and also working to obtain their GEDs. "The house will be sold to a first-time, low-income home-buyer when it is completed. So (her issues) are women, children, economic opportunity, inner city poverty, housing, and education" in her job as a program director at the Poughkeepsie YWCA.

The long-term impacts of Model UN have been equally important in influencing the kind of persons my students have become after they completed their undergraduate and graduate and professional educations. Jeremy Linden, a Vassar graduate wrote, "Model UN is largely responsible for the extent that I am a political person today…the program has given me a much firmer grasp on …my own opinions…I realize now that I am a political person…and that…experience…has led to my looking to change career directions, from archives and museum work to teaching at the high school or (community) college level." Ays Necioglu, a Vassar graduate and a Turkish national, wants to remain in the United States, and she wants "to work as a filmmaker for UNICEF, or UNESCO, or an agency that will help those people in the world who may not have the opportunities that many of us have." David Ambroz, also a Vassar graduate and currently a second-year law student at UCLA, states that his "[s]ensitivity to international affairs and politics has been sharpened…If anything (Model UN) reinforced my tendency for involvement." When William Galston writes that "[w]e've spent the past 30 years squandering the social capital we inherited from our parents," he should be introduced to Linden, Necioglu, Ambroz, and many others who are graduates of my program and those who have been delegates over the years to the NMUN from other colleges and universities. (Galston)

It is hard to dispute what Robert Putnam and Amitai Etzioni maintain, that Americans suffer from an excess of individualism, too much emphasis on rights (and its more recent counterpart, victimization), too little emphasis on responsibilities, and an overemphasis on litigation to resolve community-based problems, formerly resolved by compromise and cooperation. (Boyte) Nevertheless, as a teacher, I deal with mostly young adults and some non-traditional students everyday. I recognize what Molly Andolina *et al*write is true: "[y]outh engagement won't be boosted in a single stroke. There is no simple solution to apply. No magic tonic to administer, no engagement gene to alter. The pathways to participation are too wide and too varied and they are influenced by too many factors—families, schools, clubs, groups, churches, even friends. But if this means civic involvement is unlikely to be spurred by a lone strike, it also suggests that there are multiple prods to encourage participation." (Andolina *et al* 2003, 279)

As a teacher and as a concerned and involved citizen, I am aware of the ignorance, apathy, and indifference, which characterize the attitudes of many Americans of all ages regarding global, national and local problems today. Yet, I am optimistic because of the young adults and non-traditional students who have been involved in Model UN and the service learning courses represented in the Carnegie Political Engagement Project, and what all these students have learned from their very diverse experiences. I know and still communicate with many of my former students, including Laura Vallance, who stated in her survey responses, that she continues to be "very active in (her) local community." She volunteers "with the elderly on a regular basis." And, Claudia Archimede who believes that she will continue to work for "justice and equality for women " and to work against "violence in all forms" for the rest of her life. And, Clare Kelly-Barra, a non-traditional DCC and Smith College graduate, who also remains "optimistic" because if she "can make a small difference, then (she) believes others can as well." And, Jeremy Linden, who wrote: "I believe in my ability to make a difference and change the world, even if only one small step at a time...." And perhaps, as Anthony DeRosa reminds us, we are all " responsible for shaping the minds of our future leaders and problem solvers. To that end, we need to place a greater emphasis on the importance of education and...involvement in the community."

Fifteen surveys are hardly conclusive, but they do offer a snapshot of what can be accomplished in an effective educational environment. These results coupled with what I have observed from other students in my program and what I have learned from faculty colleagues at Model UN provide me with enough examples so that I can be reasonably optimistic about the future. The Carnegie team posed some questions toward the end of their book, *Educating Citizens*, which are worth restating. They asked, "do students believe at the end that they have developed an increased understanding of and interest in ethical or social issues? Do they expect to pursue these issues further, either intellectually or in some practical activity? Has the course changed the way they think about their own beliefs or goals?" (Colby *et al* 2003, 263) While I do not believe that every student in Model UN would answer "yes," most would respond affirmatively if these questions were posed to them today. In short, Model UN has reinforced existing beliefs about service and community; in other cases, it has helped develop them. We

need more programs like Model UN, and we need more service learning courses because they do engage students, which, in many cases, lasts a lifetime. "Bowling Alone" need not be a self-fulfilling prophecy. In fact, "Bowling Alone" can become "Bowling Together."

Finally, Damien J. LaVera, is the co-author of an important and massive study of arms control agreements since 1945, *Cornerstones of Security*.[xv] Sholars, students, and diplomats will use the book in studying and in writing future arms control agreements. LaVera was a Model UN student from DCC and eventually one of my teaching assistants. When he was my assistant, he commuted from SUNY Binghamton (his transfer school) to the Vassar campus for the class, and he conducted office hours for students by e-mail and telephone. He sent me an advanced copy of the book with a note; in part, he wrote, "[t]o think, my first exposure to arms control treaties was your Model UN program! I could never have done this without (the program)." I know that it was his experience in Model UN, which changed his life and prompted him to pursue a career that has implications for everyone who lives on this planet. This is the kind of lasting impact we can have as educators "preparing America's undergraduates for lives of moral and civic responsibility." [xvi]

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The Survey

Fifteen former Model UN students from The Hudson River Group were asked to complete a survey about their experiences and the impact of the program on them. Fourteen responded by e-mail; one in a personal interview. The survey questions are recorded below, and the results are discussed in this paper. All of the participants gave permission to use their names and the data collected in this paper.

1. What is your age?
2. What is your current occupation?
3. Were you a DCC student only?
4. Were you a Vassar student only?
5. Were you both a Vassar and a DCC student?
6. What effect, if any, did the Model UN have on your sense of yourself as a student and as a political person? (Please explain)
7. Has the Model UN had an impact on your choice of careers (or potential careers)? (Please explain)
8. Has the Model UN had a continuing impact on the kind of person you are now? (Please explain)
9. Has the Model UN had any continuing impact on your sensitivity to U.S. foreign policy and global problems/issues in general? (Please explain)
10. Are you a more engaged or less engaged citizen now because of your Model UN experience? [Engagement may include involvement in issue-oriented organizations, assisting candidates for public office, running for public office, voting, writing letters to the editor of your newspaper, serving on a jury, and volunteering in your community, etc.] (Please explain)
11. What issues concern you today (locally, nationally, and internationally)?
12. Are you more optimistic or less optimistic about the future of this country, its role in the world, and the ability of human beings to resolve problems? (Please explain)

Notes

[i] Thomas Patterson is Bradley Professor of Government and the Press at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. His book, *The Vanishing Voter*, is an analysis of citizen apathy in the United States about the political process in general. The book was written before September 11 and the war with Iraq, but its conclusions remain valid even with the surge of newly reported patriotism.

[ii] William Galston is the Director of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at the University of Maryland. He was quoted in an article by Derrick DePledge, "Patriotic sentiment, but not civic activism, rises among young people," distributed by the Gannett New Service (July 4, 2003).

[iii] As quoted by Harry Boyte in his Dewey Lecture, November 1, 2002.

[iv] Jason Elfenbein is a graduate of Dutchess Community College and Vassar College. He is also a graduate of Stanford Law School. The quote is from the essay on his law school application, which was published by Barron's in *Essays That Will Get You Into Law School*. Jason Elfenbein participated in the National Model UN program as a student at Dutchess Community College and as a Teaching Assistant in the program at Vassar College.

[v] Ken Topolsky has been executive producer and has directed episodes of *The Wonder Years* and *Party of Five* for television. He has also been involved in the production of motion picture films and records. In his survey responses, he wrote, "[o]n a local and national level I am distressed with what I see as a growing trend. When I was young, healthcare, education and justice were all rights that every citizen was guaranteed; these days they have become privileges that an ever-decreasing number of citizens seem to enjoy. On a global level I fear that a cultural hegemony is dividing the world in a way that is far more dangerous than the Cold War ever was. As Americans, we are despised on the one hand and envied on the other. We posses a sense of smugness, entitlement and superiority that is rooted in ignorance. I miss the compassion of the "greatest generation" and know that that was always built on the values and beliefs of those that came before. I am liberal but am not scared by those words. Ethics, morality, values and beliefs are concepts that have become dear to me."

[vi] This view is attributed to Robert Wuthnow, a Princeton Sociologist, who believes that Americans are not really disengaged, rather they are "changing the definition of engagement." This is in response to the Putnam thesis that America has been depleting its stock of "social capital" for several decades. Both views are discussed by D.W. Miller in "Perhaps We Bowl Alone, but Does It Really Matter?"

[vii] Theda Skoepol's views are quoted and discussed by D.W. Miller in "Perhaps We Bowl Alone, but Does It Really Matter?"

[viii] Robin Lauita is a non-traditional student at the age of 43. She transfers to Vassar College from Dutchess Community College in the fall of 2003.

[ix] Hereafter referred to as "the course."

[x] The Model UN course is a very expensive undertaking (delegate and delegation fees, and additional expenses for transportation, hotel rooms, and meals), and it is generously supported by Dutchess Community College, its student government association, Vassar College, its Office of the Dean of the Faculty, and by student fees at Vassar.

[xi] Anthony DeRosa is 24 years old, was active in student government at DCC, and is now an Information Management Specialist and Program Coordinator at the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators.

[xii] Martin's newsletter recently received a letter from the City of Seattle Police Chief. CleanScapes is the primary sponsor of a program to rid dumpsters from the alleys in Seattle. The letter reads in part, "[f]rom a law enforcement perspective, ridding the alleys of dumpsters eliminates hiding places for criminal activity, reduces the availability of bottles and other make-shift missiles during disturbances and promotes both community and officer safety. In my years as Commander of the West Precinct, I experimented with alley closures, emphasis patrols, and other strategies to reduce the chronic drug dealing, assaults and robberies, prostitution and myriad other forms of uncivil behavior that often takes place in the alleys where dumpsters are present. It is this behavior that makes people afraid to use the neighborhood and could contribute to the decline of the quality of life and the economic health of the area. The dumpsters in these alleys often serve as a shield for this illegal behavior. It is my observations and those of other officers in this area that the alleys where the dumpsters have been removed are without question safer and more sanitary. I have long been a supporter of this program and know that the Pioneer Square community and officers of the West Precinct appreciate the change as well."

[xiii] Laura Vallance, a DCC graduate, is currently a lawyer with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in Washington, D.C.

[xiv] Michael Brenner, a Vassar graduate, is currently enrolled at Fordham Law School in New York City.

[xv] Published by the University of Washington Press in 2003.

[xvi] From the book title, *Educating Citizens*, by Anne Colby *et al.*

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